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REMARKS
ON THE
DUTY OF THE SEVERAL STATES,
IN REGARD TO
PUBLIC EDUCATION.

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REMARKS, &c.

A SYSTEM of education which may give to every member of American society, a portion of knowledge adequate to the discharge of his duties as a man and a citizen of the republic, is essential to the advancement of private interest, the maintenance of public virtue, the due appreciation of talents, the preservation of a sacred regard to principle, and of a high tone of moral sentiment. A system which affords to such as are endued with superior capacities, the means of making proportional attainments, is also intimately connected with the interest of the nation, at *home*, through those who administer, and *abroad* through those who represent our government; with the extension of just and liberal opinions in relation to the effect of free governments; with the union and fraternity subsisting between the members of the confederacy, and with the general character of the nation for liberal sentiments and grateful recollections.

If these statements be just, we are led to ask under what *authority* the blessings of learning are to be secured to the nation? The government of the Union has manifested no decided inclination to act efficiently in the matter. And as the legislative department has shown no disposition to exercise its acknowledged powers, in relation to this subject, even within the district where it possesses sole dominion, it is not to be expected that the same power should be extended over the whole nation, where a *plausible*, at least, if not *valid* Constitutional objection may be raised against its exercise;—and much less are we to suppose that the concerns of education will supersede, in the minds of *executive* officers, the great subjects of war and peace, of commerce and revenue, of foreign embassies and international relations. These great, absorbing interests will, of necessity, continue to engross the attention and speculations of the active, aspiring candidates for public distinctions and emoluments. Happy will it be for the community, if those whom it

delights to honour with a station in this department, shall be at all times found experimentally acquainted with the advantages of a sound and finished education, united with commanding talents, and an integrity above suspicion. A statesman with these qualifications cannot fail to exercise an important indirect, if not immediate influence on the standard of taste, knowledge, and refinement throughout the land, and to stimulate, by countenance and example, what he may not be able to support by positive legal provisions.

In proportion, however, as knowledge, whether elementary or profound, is to be regarded as a blessing, in the same degree is the want of it, to be esteemed a misfortune. Each and every portion of this Union has therefore an interest in the success of every effort to diffuse the means of education, separate from any calculation of profit and loss, and from any reference to the great and momentous national concern, already mentioned, as involved in this subject. Indeed there are various interests besides that of education, in which the nation at large has a deep stake; yet the general legislature cannot, consistently with its prescribed powers, materially interfere. Such are the encouragement of agriculture, the bestowing of charters for local establishments, whose effects, notwithstanding, are felt far beyond the sphere of their immediate operation. Adverting to the manner in which *these* interests are, and must continue to be managed among us, we are furnished with an answer to our inquiry by what authority the benefits of learning are to be conferred on the whole American community. Several State legislatures have already practically settled the question, by a long course of legislation on the subject. Others have contented themselves with partial, inconsiderable efforts, applied to a class of persons not the most likely to appreciate the blessings of knowledge, and least disposed to acknowledge an obligation which places them in a degraded relation to their fellow-citizens. A third class of States are still wavering between a resolution to provide an efficient system of educa-

tion for themselves, and a vague, perhaps a vain hope, that something may still be expected from the liberality or the justice of the general government, towards this object. We cannot refrain from expressing in this place the admiration excited by the policy of one enlightened State, which while engaged in an enterprise for internal improvement, the grandest that our country has ever witnessed, perhaps that the genius of man has ever devised, simultaneously erected a system of *universal* as well as *liberal* education, by means of which more than eight thousand ordinary, and numerous superior seminaries are put into operation, and nearly 500,000 youths of both sexes are annually admitted to the inestimable blessings of either solid and useful, or polite and finished education. To estimate justly the immense influence of that amount of talent which will thus be brought from a dormant to an active condition, is perhaps beyond the power of calculation.

To behold its full display, we must search every cottage and farm-house as well as every mansion, for the energy and enterprise, united with the firmness and sobriety of character which it has developed ; we must note the change from a devotion to material life and animal gratifications, to a pursuit of intellectual speculations ; we must penetrate, in short, every bosom made in any degree capable of being warmed by the radiance of genius, or filled with pure and lofty sentiments.

An apprehension has sometimes been indulged, that the interests of the several States would become merged and lost in that of the confederation. Nothing is better fitted to preserve the distinct individuality of the States, than reserving to themselves the superintendence of the concerns of education. Not only will the thoughts and opinions of the inhabitants of each State then possess a distinctive peculiarity, but the feelings, biases, and mental associations, will also be found to retain a strong binding force between the individual and his native State. The *earliest* impressions are, to a great majority of mankind, the strongest that they ever realize.

When these impressions are made with the seal of virtue, they remain the pledges of future excellence ; when they are derived from circumstances in our social condition that possess genuine worth, or from institutions which assist to confer that worth, they enchain the affections with a force which no subsequent changes of fortune can sever. The attachment to our native State which we thus derive from her institutions for education, is, however, perfectly consistent with an enlarged patriotism, embracing within its circle every portion of our country, as well as with a liberal philanthropy that extends its good wishes, and would extend its good offices to every member of the human race. Indeed, one of the first effects of a liberal system of education, on the minds and feelings of a community, is a display of more extended benevolence, of a less niggardly parsimony, of a magnanimity that can embrace sublime conceptions, of a patriotism that regards the greatness and glory as well as the quiet and happiness of the nation ; and both the one and the other, as paramount to the petty profits, mean devices, and sordid calculations of mere self-interest.

But perhaps it will be contended, that if a State possess eminent physical advantages, enjoying a salubrious climate, a productive soil, navigable streams, and profitable mines, these may suffice to insure her rank and respectability among her neighbours. But let us not deceive ourselves. Mankind are not to be imposed upon by these substitutes for true greatness. They will not accept the vain display of acres and roods of arable, pasture, and woodland, as clear evidence of the *greatness* of a State. They are not yet such converts to the doctrines of *materialism* as to fancy that the spirit and intellect of society are wholly dependent on matter of any sort, and least of all on lifeless, brute matter, for their efficiency. A State may, with all these physical capabilities, proceed in a monotonous course of pecuniary prosperity, as injurious to its moral purity and its mental activity as the severest visitations of calamity. But this course can terminate only in weakness. Animal gratification may

be as abundant, uninterrupted, and intense as the grossest appetite could desire, and yet nothing may be added to the permanent reputation of the State.

The destiny of man is for activity and improvement ; the destiny of *states*, that would maintain a respectable rank, is for activity and improvement. Without this character of progressive advancement, any single State must soon feel its relative degradation, must feel, (if there be a feeling in the community,) the mortifying sense of *insignificance*.

Unless, then, the moral and intellectual eminence of a great state, correspond to its physical advantages, the latter rather redound to its disgrace than to its credit. The lover of his country walks by the streams and mountains of his native land, and asks himself—what are the destinies of this physical Elysium ? what are the glorious realities to which the sages, and bards, and patriots of our country have, for the last half century, been aiming the labours of their minds, the glow of their eloquence, the inspiration of their verse ? Is it to witness these vales which might vie with Tempe in amenity, these rivers to which Peneus and Tiber are but puny rills,—swarming with hordes of mere grovelling worms in human shape ? to see these noble forests levelled to give place to a rank and poisonous growth of sleeping plants, with the form only of God's image—breathing only to exhale a moral pestilence—and to turn into a pandemonium what might otherwise be a paradise ?

The question presses itself on the whole, and every part of the nation, whether our citizens shall dream away existence in inglorious ease, following the blind impulses of animal passion ; whether they shall pursue the servile track of imitation, from age to age ; whether they shall say, and believe, and do, just as much as their fathers, *and no more* ; or whether they shall obey the dictates of sound reason, adopt the results of faithful experience, be alive and awake to the dearest interests of humanity, as well as to all the beauties and glories of nature by which they are surrounded ; shall strike out new paths in which to mount to perfection ; and shall have a political, a philosophi-



cal, a moral, and religious faith of their own, unbiased by the absurd and arbitrary dogmas of sophists and demagogues and bigots on the one hand, or of libertines, disorganizers, and infidels on the other?

These are questions on which each separate State of this Union, which has not already settled the point, is deeply interested in deciding; inasmuch as on the promptitude and correctness of the decision, depends in a great measure the prosperity of its present, and the character of its future generations. Those States which shall have the wisdom and foresight to adopt sound and salutary systems of public education, will no longer feel the mortification of being regarded as the objects of derision to a whole nation, the more awkward and ridiculous, in proportion to their superior bulk. Their chief magistracy will be honourable and independent; because well informed constituents will know their own dignity to be degraded when their sovereign authority is delegated to the hands of drivelling imbecility. Their courts of justice will be upright, learned, and wise, because their decisions must be submitted to the scrutiny of a discerning public, the humblest member of which can detect errors, inconsistencies, and partialities. Their statute book will not exhibit a tissue of clumsy enactments, each vieing with its predecessors in absurdity; because ignorance will no longer be deemed an essential requisite in a legislator. Their cities will echo to the voice of honest labour, greeted with the frequent interchange of courtesies and kindness. Their sons shall be distinguished for elevated sentiments, raising them equally from that sordidness which stoops to grasp at petty dishonest gains, and from that contemptible pride which shrinks from a pursuit of honest and industrious callings; while their daughters shall be regarded with that sacred delicacy which revolts at the thought of an unhallowed purpose, and with that chivalrous pride which scorns to impose on them the menial offices of life.

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